Narrative form and the creation and subversion of architectural ornament.
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The turning of pages in a book represents a linear journey through language. However, there are book forms that challenge the linear nature of such a journey and books that offer alternatives to the act of page turning. Collections of unbound sheets and objects allow us to determine our own non-linear journeys through language. Paper engineering allows structures to rise up transforming the page into a stage where we enact a different type of reading. The book form is flexible and open to invention. This paper proposes that we consider particular types of architecture as forms of illustrated books and the journey through such architectural spaces as being akin to a journey through language. Reference to architectural forms in illustrative imagery is common, Ware's Building Stories and Mcguire's Here, are good examples that uses images of architecture as visual language. However, the idea of actual architectural structures operating as language is contested from the architectural point of view, though we can certainly think of architecture as being language like and there being an architectural rhetoric or voice. We can also consider an established phenomenology of architecture as being part of our instinctual 'reading' of buildings. To develop this idea of 'reading' architectural structures, I will consider a number of historic and contemporary examples and the role played by decoration and ornamentation in triggering a transformative process. This transformation allows users of architectural space to become an audience, where the architectural structure becomes experienced and read as a book form. The simple act of placing images on walls does not transform the building into a book form. The structure needs to be in conversation with the imagery that uses its skin, forming a unified language and whole experience.

The historic examples used in this paper consider how the use of decoration develops the specific structural characteristics of the building and its intended phenomenological or rhetorical values. In contrast to this the contemporary examples use decorative forms to rehabilitate previously undesirable

architectural experiences, establishing new readings of the structure, re-anchoring the phenomenological and rhetorical values. In all these examples the creation of visual ornament and decoration is in some form subversive. That is to say it develops a critical dialogue between the reader and the structures that are read.

This paper has an ambition to inform and develop the interaction between illustrative practice and architecture and point to areas, which offer new potential for illustrative practice. The historic examples discussed here are rarely considered as Illustration and the contemporary examples with one exception are seen as being part of Fine Art practice. I hope the proposal to consider the potential of architecture as a form of illustrated book will present new possibilities to both architects and illustrators.

Images of works ascribed to Giotto; The Scrovegni Chapel, Padua and the Upper Church at Assisi

These chapels employ lavish decoration that invites the user to become an audience, reading and interacting equally with the imagery and the architecture. Giotto was both an architect and a painter who used a range of visual strategies to enhance the audience's reading and experience of the sacred space. The paintings make consistent reference to architectural forms both fictive and real to inform the narrative. They also use illusionist imagery to project decorative architectural features out of and into the picture plane blending our experience of real and fictive space time. At both sites decorative imagery is an important signifier of the wall surface and Laura Jacobus' authorative research asserts that Giotto uses the painted surfaces of walls as a liminal space between our real space/time and the fictive pictorial space time of the painting and that this is used to explore the tension between real life experience and sacred narrative.

The paintings also echo the journey through architectural space with narrative journeys through pictorial space.

Images of the Triumphal arch, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua

Either side of the triumphal arch are two illusionistic rooms. These allow the real world to penetrate pictorial space. These illusionistic rooms are bold statements, due to their dominant position on the triumphal arch and their ability to confuse the reading of real and fictive architectural space. The illusionistic rooms puncture the picture plane as real rooms would puncture the wall. Jacobus understands the annunciation scenes as a blending of an annunciation enactment that would take part on the site each year with the sacred narrative. Consequently real world events are embodied in the site, the architecture and the imagery through the use of pictorial space.

Images of fictive Niches, Scovegni Chapel, Padua

In contrast to the small rooms, along the North and South walls Giotto has painted two bands of illusionistic niches containing illusions of sculptures. These are projected into our real space time and illustrate Vices on one side of the chapel and virtues on the other.

Image of clerics robe from the judgement day wall, Scrovegni chapel, Padua.

The chapel's patron Enrico Scrovegni is pictured here offering the chapel to God on the Judgment day wall. This is a critical act in the socio-political context of the whole chapel and the relationship between his family and the church of that period. The gown of an attending cleric has fallen in front of the decorative banding that runs around the image. Fictive and real space are confused. Conventionally decorative banding confirms the surface of the wall. Giotto subverts this convention to disrupt our understanding of the picture plane allowing sacred and secular space to be seamlessly joined.

Image of Judgement Day Scene, Scrovegni chapel, Padua.

To develop this subversion further, the painted decorative banding is also an illusion of three-dimensional architectural ornament that extends across the lower wall and up through the corners.

Images of pulpits within the chapel, Scrovegni chapel, Padua.

The pulpit in this image appears in multiple paintings around the chapel. Laura Jacobus points out that this reoccurring image appears at points of entry to the chapel. She goes on to propose that this pulpit is an image of the real pulpit that the congregation would have experienced within the chapel and the pictured viewing angles correspond to actual viewing angles experienced as the congregation enter and turn into the space. Jacobus defines these scenes as ‘threshold’ images whose function is to aid the transition from secular to sacred space. This is achieved by referencing actual structures in the space time of the narrative.

Image, the Upper Church at Assisi

At Assisi Giotto uses decorative banding to subtly control the points at which an audience would pause to read sections of a very long register of frescos.

Image, Decorative banding around the scenes, Upper Church at Assisi

The frescoes are to be read in groups of three. Each group of three images is framed by a painted decorative band. Rebold Benton’s research asserts that the illusionistic painting techniques encourage us to perceive the bands as real world ornamental architectural details. The single vanishing point for this illusionistic detail works best when we position ourselves at the centre of the three images.

This strategy is repeated along the full length of the walls. The decorative banding is intended to pause the audience's progress and subtly manoeuvre the spectator through the chapel controlling pace and flow through the narrative.

Image of exsisting Roman temple in Assisi

Similar to the referencing of the pulpit within images at Padua, Giotto makes reference within an image at Assisi to a real Roman structure to be found within the town. This provides a concrete context anchoring the narrative within a historic period and a real space experienced by the audience drawing them into the narrative.

Image of ceiling painted by Fra Pozzo in Saint Ignatius church, Rome

In Rome Fra Pozzo's ceiling painting is also concerned with the blending of real and fictive space through lavish decoration. There are in fact two architectural plans, one fictive and the other real.

Images of two architectural drawings for Saint Ignatius church

In these images we can see that the lower fictive building is open to the sky and the heavens while the real has a vaulted ceiling.

Image of ceiling painted by Fra Pozzo in Saint Ignatius church, Rome

Viewing the ceiling from a preferred spot marked by a circle on the floor the illusion of heavenly space is achieved. Ornamental features are part of the real and fictive structure and in some places pass through the picture plane.

Image of ceiling painted by Fra Pozzo in Saint Ignatius church, Rome

The audience is required to occupy a static position, unlike Giotto's designs that require a narrative journey through the structure. The audience witnesses a transitory moment as Saint Ignacious ascends to heaven. The illustrated fictive space is welded to the architectural concrete reality.

The use of embellishment and decoration is integral to the intended rhetoric of these sacred structures as is the communication of narrative. In contrast the following contemporary examples are secular, purely functional and re-purposed but parallels can be drawn with the work of Giotto and Pozzo to allow us a better understanding of the interaction between decorative image and architectural structure.

Image, The Factory, Hong Kong, 2008

This is a refurbished industrial building that uses large wall paintings by the illustrator Mauro Marchesi. The architect Cipriani describes the images as a prequel to Marchesi's graphic novels. These paintings occur throughout the building taking advantage of the building's structure to inform and enrich the fictional narrative. Cipriani describes the chase, which begins in the wider city and concludes on the roof of the building. In the underground car park Hollywood Bau catches a diamond thief, the diamond falls to the floor and shatters. Each facet of the shattered diamond reveals a different narrative, which is developed on different levels of the building and concludes on the roof. Prior to refurbishment passage through the corridors would have been mundane, now the building is transformed into book form, the user becomes a reader of real and fictive space. Marchesi's narrative encourages an exploration and re-imagining of the space and its city context blurring the boundaries between fictive and real space-time.

Images of TFL art projects

TFL's Art on the Underground projects have commissioned artists to install works across the transport network. TFL's project is part of a long engagement between the transport system and the visual arts, which began in the early 20th century as an effort to improve and enrich a challenging architectural environment. The current user's experience of the transport space is enhanced by over a century of decorative projects. The TFL projects have preferred fine artists and introduced a more conceptual content. The three examples discussed here allow passengers to reflect on their journey through the transport system and essentially 'read' the space they pass through. The promotion of a reflective state echoes aspects of the previously considered sacred spaces.

Images, Wallingers Labyrinth for TFL

Mark Wallinger's, Labyrinth, 2013, has been permanently installed in all 270 underground stations and each Labyrinth differs in its design. All the images are enamel on sheet metal, a process that echoes the traditional manufacture of signage on the underground. In each station Wallinger's Labyrinth shares space with a visually similar and now iconic schematic graphic map of the transport system.

Both the map and the labyrinth conceptualise space. The map however presents a problematic maze between points of departure and destination. On the other hand Wallinger's labyrinth introduces a poetic transport, the single pathway of a labyrinth avoids problems of choice, it focuses and calms the viewer if they choose to carefully trace a path to its inevitable outcome.

Image, Labyrinth at Chartes Cathedral

Wallinger is making reference to the historical use of Labyrinths. Chartres cathedral has a large labyrinth embedded into the floor. Pilgrims would on arrival walk the labyrinth and the journey would calm and focus them in preparation for the conclusion of their sacred journey. The labyrinth acts as a threshold into the sacred space. Positioned in every station, Wallinger's Labyrinth may also be read as a threshold image preparing the passenger for the transition to and from subterranean space. The transport map and the labyrinth are both conceptualisations of space designed to aid the transition from knowable space above ground to a disorienting and unknowable subterranean space. The map and the Labyrinth also point to the sameness and the difference we encounter as we are transported through the network and the disorienting effect this has upon us.

Images of Trabazian's installation at Southwark tube station

Mitra Tabrizian's temporary TFL project 'You Don't Know What Nights are Like' takes the form of large photographs that decorated the exterior of Southwark Tube Station. These images illustrate the largely hidden lives of London's night workers and the part played by TFL in their transportation from the edge of the city into their central London workplaces. The visual narrative infers the potential for the whole transport system to become a threshold space that interconnects different social and economic areas. We are invited to read the transport network as a site where personal narratives are written. Short passages of text from interviews with night workers accompany the images allowing the audience to construct narratives from the real life experiences of others. Eleanor Pinfold, Head of Art on the Underground, describes these texts as internal voices that reflect on lost time.

The work invites the audience to consider their own inner voice, blending their own real and immediate experience. Subtle visual signifiers such as the bus stop and the railway viaduct link the immediate experience of the geographic near with the imagined far, and the sense of twilight as a liminal space signifies the transition from one state into another. The tube station is consequently identified not solely as part of a system that mechanistically transports us through geographic spaces, characterised by social and economic boundaries, but one, which also transports us poetically into a conceptual space where a reflective inner voice may construct narratives.

Tabrizian's work directs us to the poetic in the everyday. She also anchors the images within a very real socio-political context. Similarly the Scrovegni chapel combines a beguiling poetic narrative with the socio-political terrain of the period. Both works seek to bring through a process of 'reading' a sense of the poetic to their respective audiences and to transport them through the blending of real and fictive experience to an internally reflective space.

Image of Poncelet's Wrapper at Edgeware rd station

Poncelet's Wrapper uplifts and excites a windowless and unremarkable structure. As the title Wrapper suggests there is a sense of the architectural structure being subverted into becoming an object such as a gift or special purchase that has the function of concealment leading to surprise. This also leads to a deceptive resizing of the structure. Those travellers limited to a single encounter are impressed by its spectacular and unexpected presence. Those who are regular commuters can through consistent examination realise the many visual references to the local environment.

Image of Poncelet's Wrapper at Edgeware rd station

The highly decorative tiles for example use a colour scheme borrowed from the coded colours of lines on the transport map and the repetitive forms are

referenced from surrounding architectural elements. The interconnected nature of an urban experience is illustrated by this building and Wrapper invites a ‘close reading’ and critical engagement with the surrounding architectural environment.

The architectural examples discussed here invite users to read the space they occupy. The creation or subversion of decorated, embellished and ornamental surface is a key element in transforming a functional structure and a space where meaningful encounters can be realised.

There is a real potential for illustrators to extend their expertise with the book form into an architectural context and develop visual languages derived from historical examples that allow for narratives to be both written and read as architectural experiences.